

SUFISM: A METHODOLOGY OF CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

The introspection, the realization of the truth and the motors of change are closely associated to the movement and process of history, society, culture, politics, religion, ethics, art and literature and mysticism, thus shaping a new world order on the reflections of the visionary soul or the mystic. It creates a new language, symbols, metaphors and idioms, with new and creative meanings and dimensions for its transmission. The development of Sufism can not be seen, analyzed, and realized in the light of absolutist view point. Such an approach leads to misreading of facts, and curtails the realities and defaces the facts and factualities. An open and unbiased reading, understanding and analysis is necessary for unfolding the truth and real meanings of the philosophico-mystical themes. One cannot translate the words, facts, ideas and the developments of history, without heeping them in their proper context and relational forms. Sufism stems from the perennial and as such it must continuously introspect its own system, concepts and methods, for a living organism cannot bear a stagnant approach. Sufism does not disconnect man from the world but involves him in it, for it becomes a revealing factor and ground of his new terrifying flights. The world emerges to him not something alien but as a factuality, spiritual in its nature and depth. Through this change what was earlier self-repugnant to him becomes self-revealing to him. Every action becomes self healing and self imposed and self preserving.

It is not a rude or merely simple introversion but a drastic change in psychology and perspective of man which throws him to the indepth introspection and realization of the primary truth or truths and the concepts and motors of change. The introspection (in its broader perspective and application), the realization of the truth and the motors of change are closely associated to the movement and process of history, society, culture, politics, religion, ethics, art and literature and mysticism, thus shaping a new world order on the reflections of the visionary soul or the mystic. It creates a new language, symbols, metaphors and idioms, with new and creative meanings and dimensions for its transmission ... and very forcefully changes the old idioms and systems or absorbs and translates them in its own form of transmission while changing their face, meaning, connotation and motif.

The process raises the following vital issues:

- The question of the logical development and the interconnectivity of the various themes in a grand philosophico-spiritual system.
- For a scientific and analytical study of the spiritual system of Islam one has to understand and re-understand and analyze and re-analyze the prophetic mission and the historico-civilizational change under its shadows – viz-a-viz the primary concepts and the conceptual framework of Islam and the process of their application and interpretational modes especially the mystic way and explanations of the mystics of Islam.
- One has to understand the undercurrent very systematically and deeply with an uncompromising critical outlook that gave birth to various thematic structures, movements and political vandalism in the Islamia Society and culture.
- And has to understand deeply and critically the position, role, themes and teachings of real sufi masters. One can not simply blind himself from the total historico-cultural process as it has happened in philosophy and scholasticism by holding Mutazilism as an episode of confrontation on the question of the status of the grave sinner between Hasan and Wasil and in the same way between Jubai and Ashari.

- Historical questions, processes, issues, doctrines and doctrinal developments and religio-social and scientific movement can not be simply misplaced and ordinarily treated in such a way.

In the same way the development of Sufism can not be seen, analyzed, and realized in the light of absolutist view point. Such an approach leads to misreading of facts, and curtails the realities and defaces the facts and factualities. An open and unbiased reading, understanding and analysis is necessary for unfolding the truth and real meanings of the philosophico-mystical themes one cannot translate the words, facts, ideas and the developments of history, without keeping them in their proper context and relational forms.

A hardcore point of view is always devastating. It not only hides but defaces the realities and gives ruthlessly illogical and false meaning to the historical developments, themes and concepts and methodologies and tries always to stick to its own biased way of understanding and force people to accept the same.

This approach has misguided the Muslim ummah in general and the historians and scholars in particular. The issue is not how much we understand but what we understand. And the next and following issue is how unbiased and realistic our way of understanding is. This raises the question of the principle of selection and management of facts.

Pre-conceived options always distorts facts, themes, thematic structures and history: The history and the historical personalities and their conceptual and doctrinal and methodical frameworks can not be tailored in the isolation of the facts and the inner and outer developments of the world around them or influencing them viz-a-viz the past, which is ruthlessly hanging on their shoulders and which they can not deny and the forces that moulded, changed, shaped and reshaped their ideas and behaviour, concepts and language format, expressions and idioms and goals and targets.

We have to be highly critical, and conscious like a doctor medicating and operating upon a patient. He can not avoid the causes and situations, that generated the disease and cannot avoid the symptoms and conditions of the patient. His approach must be always critical and pragmatic for reading the disease, its results and consequences and its proper medication.

Every thinkers has and bears the weight of history on his shoulders and he can not avoid his role for being the creative agent in the interpretation, shaping and reshaping of history.

While reading or analyzing or disputing a problem or a concept or a movement or a philosopher, artist, scientist or a sufi we need to a

keep a falconic eye on the past or the history and the themes that shape his thought and discussions.

To live in an ivory tower does not work. Thoughts influence and the influence has a history of its own on and for every thinker. We cannot think that Hassan-al-Basari, Rabia, Bayazid and from Junaid or al-Ghazali had no issues and questions of and from their past history and in their approach of their dissolution had no roots in or effects from their past.

A culture is an operative phenomena. It operates and is operated upon. It is only the dead culture that has no role in shaping the human mind or society like a corpse.

There is one more issue; every thinker or artists is not necessarily explored forever. Great thinkers influence time and remain influencing it. Their words and colours or tunes change colours with the emerging times. So they are always changing in their meanings, influences and applications. Such thinkers and artists are known as genius. It can be that their thoughts become irrelevant for some time, in some varying situations, but we can not deny that even then they work as a clay and help us in understanding others.

The question of the multidimensional meaning of a term is always one main problem in the philosophico-mystical discussions. A term or a concept has not necessarily the same meaning for two thinkers or the artists or the mystics and it can change its shades, and it can some time even refuse the totality of some thought system and sometimes can join it, to explore its inherent or applicational meanings. The monstrous conclusions cannot lead us to realize the truth.

A bizarre approach in analyzing philosophy or mysticism which is a continuous process of 'realization of the truth' is deterrent to thought process.

Sufism stems from the perennial and the only living divine world view Islam, and as such it must continuously introspect its own system, concepts and methods, for a living organism cannot bear a stagnant approach.

And its indepth study narrates the romantic story of its dynamism. A flight for the search of the indepth realities and the vision and pleasure of God, who Himself is every time in a new splendor, necessitates and explains this factuality. "Everyday in (new) splendour doth He shine". This verse of al-Quran is the foundation of the Islamic spiritualism. It holds that God is continuously active and momentous in the fashioning of the universe, and directing its affairs, and categorically rejects the total and meaningless views that He sits apart from the universe after creating it. He is involved in all

affairs and is careful of His creation especially man, His caliph on the earth. "His working shows new splendoureveryday, every hour, every moment. Man is burdened with the responsibility and his primary responsibility is to explore the meanings of the names of the things 'al-asma' or the reality of the realities (the reality of things), including his own existence, its relations and meanings and connect himself with the almighty creator.

This all is possible only through knowledge; conceptual, perceptual, rational, technical, intuitional and revelational, the power only given to him amongst the creation, elevating him to the seat of caliph.

When this is the situation, how can it be even faintly conceived that the spirituality of and in Islam can be stagnant and a futile exercise without having any methodologico-theoretico-practical dynamism and change.

Sufism reveals man's search for truth by the way of his Introspection and purification of his soul, mind and body. It points beyond the boundaries of the temporal self to the depths of his real self and nature and ultimately to the Absolute self or God. It is actually the search of his own self and the dissolution of his inner dichotomies. The recognition of his reality leads him to the realization of the reality of the ultimate reality. It is a very bewildering sympathetic and revealing struggle that professes his freedom, authenticity, responsibility and intellectual honesty. It is not something fictitious or merely intellectual but a very romantic exploring search which connects him with the ultimate boundaries of his self and the reality of the universe. It extends his boundaries of relations and connects him to those revealing facts which were earlier quite extraneous to him. It does not disconnect him with the world but involves him in it, for it becomes a revealing factor and ground of his new terrifying flights. The world emerges to him not something alien but as a factuality, spiritual in its nature and depth. Thus what was earlier self repugnant to him becomes self-revealing to him. Every action becomes self healing and self imposed and self preserving.

But all this process of self revelation is a super-temporal event on the one hand and eventuality on the other.

This dramatic situation is seen in the enigma of fear and love, the burdening concepts presented by Hasan-alBasari and Rabiaal-Basari. It is Rabia who in real preserves the seeds of Mansoor Hallajs 'Tasin, Ghazalis Ihya and Miskat and Ibn Arabi's Fusus.

His concept of love became the launching pad of the scintillating mystic scenario of Islam. The doctrine of good presented by

AbulKhair and the doctrine the intoxication which emerged as a sign point of the latter mystic utterances, experiences and poetry has its roots in this maddening concept. The poetical utterances of IbulFarid and Jami, and Rumi, and in our times of Iqbal can not be studied excluding Rabia's divine murmur.

Rabia's mystical framework, catalogue, experience and expression was so peculiar, intense, high, sublime and spacious and paramouly influencing that it changed the direction of the applicational and interpretational format of the sufipath in Islam. It was a tremendous paradigm shift, shifted the mystic mind from an objective God to the subjective God, a loving one who must be loved for His love and not for His gifts, or His wrath, the leisure in heaven or out of fear of hell.

The love invites the shift in intention or in the indepth object of any work. The prime intention of love, purifies the heart from all the burdens of hell and heaven and even of love and fear.

It is love that makes Ibrahim to jump into the fires and Husain into the Karbala. It makes Ismail to offer his life and Hajira to migrate to the barren Land of Mecca and the seal of the Prophets to enter in the valley of Aqaba and Taif.

Love becomes the generator nay the ultimate mover of all the thoughts and actions of a lover. It nourishes a world of peace and tranquility. Though the lover itself burns in the alien fire, kindled by the dehumanizing forces. Mansoor's Martyrdom, narrates the truth and all about the truth.

There is no clash or conflict on the issue of mystical response to the divergent situation of the ummah between the two legendary mystics of Islam, Hasan and Rabia. The difference is on the issue of the method and way of resolution of the grave situation. Hasan's response is in the form of awakening the fear of God in the blackened hearts and Rabia answers the issue in awakening the love of God in the human heart which ultimately deters him from doing the crimes and sins which blacken his heart and shake his divine relations and integrity and authenticity.

Whether heaven or hell is a state or a locality is not really analyzed as it should have been. The problem for Rabia is not the refusal of the existence of heaven or hell or their being a state or locality. Her concern is the love of God conceived beyond both the states or localities. But to me the issue whether taken as a state or a locality is misconceived by the Islamic thinkers

In this concern, the primacy goes to the Quranic statements about the heaven and hell.

The Quran has adopts two positions:

- a. The hell and heaven as localities;
- b. The pleasure and pain as very deep psychological states

Love is an all covering and overwhelming phenomenon. It involves and captures the entire physico-spiritual boundaries of man. To break it into various categories is simply playing with words. It simply tantamounts to a Language Gorgon and is of no use in its understanding. It is like the breaching of a flower or a glass into pieces, which simply defaces it and does not help in understanding the delicate and tender phenomenon of sensibility.

To me heaven or hell as a locality involves its being a state. For the physical existence involves narrates its psychological effects.

The vision of God creates its own psychology or psychological atmosphere, and the alienation from God depicts throwing a man in some place which is condemned, so its psychological atmosphere and consequences.

“(It is) The Fire
Of (the wrath of) ALLAH
Kindled (to a blaze),
The which doth mount
(Right) to the Hearts
It shall be made
Into a vault over them,
In Columns outstretched. (al Quran, 104, 6-9)

Abdullah Yusuf Ali has explained the verses as:

This fire of punishment mounts right up to the hearts and minds of such men, and shuts them out of the love of their fellows. ‘Heart’ in Arabic means not only the seat of affection, pity, charity etc. but also of understanding and intelligent appreciation of things.

The guilty-will be choked and suffocated, for this vault of fire will cover them all over, and its scorching columns will extend over a far wider area than they imagine”. (al Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 62, 68-69, p. 1698)

Love is the intense closeness or affinity or relation without any conditions. Conditions changes love into trade where as it has no trade mark -

The Symbol of love is unbound madness for something and this makes it boundless. Love cannot be curtailed, contained and retained.

There are no boundaries of love and no conditions of love. To love some one means to sacrifice everything for it without any conditions.

It can be treated as a force or energy that connects two existences. It is the meeting ground of two souls. It is a law in itself and accepts no laws except love.

The concept has been variously defined by the philosophers, mystics, poets and even by ordinary me who are far off from the burdens and delicacies of philosophico-mystical Gorgons and statements, and utterances. It is sometimes defined as the principle of cosmic process, creative energy of civilizations, the dynamic force of religion, and sometimes as an existential and social dilemma. But it is really a Gorgon and a delima in itself. It has no rules and regulations and no ifs and buts. It is and is. It is an intrinsic kindled fire that burns and illuminates the soul. It is a sublime sense of yearning, responsibility, identity, nearness, absolute surrender and submission. And in a way it is a self imposed poverty, alienation and aloofness. It can be treated as the absolute driving force, and intense sensibility. It is the greatest existential crises, concealment and restraint and viz-a-viz the meeting place.

Here comes al-Ghazali. In his *Ihya'* he has analyzed the concept in detail. His concept of love is based on and rooted in his Epistemology and Ethical framework. On the one hand knowledge of God is the foundation of this love leading to the vision of God, the ultimate End and on the other it is one of the major virtues that makes the schemata of Ghazalian Ethical framework. The dynamism and expanded horizon of his ethical scheme and its interpretation given in *Ihya'* is very lucid and unmatched. It has influenced the all over scene of post-Ghazalian Muslim philosophical thought and has been presented by many a great Sufis like Hamadani^{et}verbatim. His ethical concepts are immensely imbued in his metaphysics.

Rabia is not a metaphysician. She is a lover. Whose love is stretched on every limb of her thought and existence. She has immersed herself in it. It is the immortal love leading to immortality. It is unconditional, without any if and but, beyond reward and punishment. It is beyond all categories of time and space. But the gravity of Rabia's love lies in its absolute purity and immunity from all conditions and wishes and results and rewards. It is love for love and nothing else. God is love, worth love, and must be loved as the only object of love. He is not to be loved because He is our creator, benefactor and beautiful but because of His being as the only Existence worthy of love.

The absoluteness of Rabia's approach shows the psycho-spiritual and moral intensity of her love with God and in no way corresponds to the negligence of duties and values as human being. It is the expression of absolute purity of heart from all other than God. Such a heart reflects not only God but all His attributes and modes of attributes. Such a heart cannot even think of a little or nominal use or exploitation of any creation of God.

It was a rebuff to all the exploitation done by the rulers, religious priests, capitalists and the agencies of vandalism, dehumanization and ruthless exploitation. In this way it was a marvelous expansion to Hasan-al-Basari's concept of fear.

It awakened the Muslim society from the ruthless slumber of forgetfulness of love the basic value of Islam and changed the scenario of mystic-socio-political thought in, and conditioning of Islamic society and directed it towards the march of love, a march towards the reduction of Muslim society and socio-religious order and reminded Muslims of forgotten I-thou relationship with God.

Love of God is rooted in the realization of God. It is not primarily an ontic experience but a psychological experience. Realization of God is a travel from one Existential and spiritual stage to another. It starts from the realization or experience of self and shifts to the realization of the universe, the creation of God or the manifestation of His attributes leading to realization of the God.

Here arises the question of the role of the Prophet. Is Prophet a link between humanity and God. Yes, it is actually the prophet, whose realization, moral grandeur, teachings and their understanding leads a traveler to the realization of the absolute. This realization emerges from the faith in Him and His apostle. The faith in prophet culminates in his love that transcends all human boundaries. If one fails to experience the love of prophet he fails in the pursuance and experience of the realization and love of God in utter disgust.

The role of the mystic teachers is very important in changing the psychology of a traveler. The change which is sometimes very slow, meager and little and sometimes very fast and quick depends upon the yearning of the traveler and his following of the sufi or spiritual path.

The sufi master creates and deepens in him the yearning and following of the Moral values and mystic path and connects the traveler with the prophetic spiritual schema. And when the experience deepens and the pursuance of moral and prophetic way becomes stronger, he perceives the visions and guidance of the prophet and gets connected with the basis of the mystic chain.